KEY INVESTMENTS IN OREGON'S FUTURE

Recommendations to the Oregon Education Investment Board
from the Vision & Policy Coalition of the Oregon Association of School Executives

INTRODUCTION

The Oregon Education Investment Board (OEIB), chaired by Governor John Kitzhaber, has launched a bold new direction for Oregon education P–20. In our role as public school district superintendents, the members of the Oregon Association of School Executives (OASE) are individually and collectively energized and motivated to support the college and career readiness objective embedded in the 40/40/20 goal. It is the right agenda at the right time to revitalize public education in Oregon.

We believe that the course Gov. Kitzhaber and the OEIB have charted for Oregon education is reminiscent of the leadership President John F. Kennedy demonstrated on May 25, 1961, when he called on Congress and the American people to commit to reaching a seemingly unreachable star. "I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth," Kennedy declared.

Not unlike the American ambition of reaching the moon, the Oregon ambition of building the world's best education system may initially seem, to many, to be a reach that exceeds our grasp. But we believe that if Oregon's leaders, educators, parents, students and citizens unflinchingly dedicate themselves to reaching this goal, we will get there.

The benefits of America's immersion in the "Space Race" were many. Our financial and intellectual investment in landing a man on the moon drove innovation and secured America's global competitiveness for decades. It launched a generation of scientists, engineers and doctors – and spawned a new national research and development enterprise. It produced innovations in health, technology, energy, security, defense and many other sectors. And it helped to fuel the nation's economic growth for nearly half a century. We believe that if Oregon makes a major and sustained statewide commitment, our education system can lead us to global competitiveness, a robust economy and a vibrant quality of life for generations to come. As public school superintendents, we pledge that with the right investment and prioritization of resources – and with the personal and collective commitment of Oregon's leaders, educators, parents, students and the public – our schools will achieve our aspirations.

We also want to reaffirm our position that, given the deep cuts that have been made in the state's funding of education over the past two decades – and corresponding staff layoffs, increased class sizes, program reductions and shortened school years – we must invest in our education infrastructure if we are to move forward. **Improved baseline funding must be a precursor to the key investments and key policy directions we are recommending below.**

Working through COSA's OASE Vision and Policy Coalition, we have discussed which initiatives have the greatest potential for enhancing student performance, achieving equity, and improving the seamless integration of educational systems P–20. As a result, we would like to offer the following recommendations for the OEIB to consider. We believe that, following restoration of a sufficient baseline of funding, these five areas, along with that which is most foundational – our ongoing and unyielding focus on quality teaching and learning – are the ones most likely to yield the greatest return on Oregon's investment in education.

September 11, 2012

Key Investment Area I:

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION—A CONTINUUM OF SERVICES FOR GRADES P–3

- **Recommendation: Provide and require full-day kindergarten for all children**

The early years in school provide the formal instructional base for all that follows. The state's initial investment in extending the opportunity for children to receive full value for these years will pay dividends for many years to come. This investment is urgent; the graduating class of 2025 is entering kindergarten this fall. In particular, we recommend that the state provide full-day kindergarten for all children beginning with the 2013-14 school year. This will require an investment above current baseline funding for the 2013-15 biennium and beyond. We further recommend that the state tap its bonding capacity to assist districts where classroom space for kindergarten is an issue. We also recommend that the legislature move toward requiring full-day kindergarten of all children. We contend that the long-term goal should be for Oregon to enact laws requiring school attendance for all by the age of five.

- **Recommendation: Provide resources for extended-day and extended-year programs**

Just as critical as pre-school and kindergarten programs is the provision of extended-day and extended-year programs for those students in grades 1 through 3 at risk of falling behind academically. Additional resources need to be provided in the 2013-15 biennium to launch or enhance extended-day and extended-year programs, primarily in schools with high percentages of economically disadvantaged and minority students.

- **Recommendation: Assure pre-school quality, promote collaboration with public schools**

We believe that enhancing the quality of early childhood education will better prepare students to tackle the new and more rigorous Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and begin their path to college and career readiness. Providing the support that enables students to read at grade level by third grade is a powerful target. However, to reach that target, children require quality pre-school experiences from credentialed and well-trained staff. Oregon's current system of early childhood education involves a diverse range of public and private programs with widely varying standards. The research on early childhood program outcomes reveals that the programs that best serve students are those with well-qualified staff. It is this insistence on employing properly credentialed staff that contributes to public pre-school programs' strong record of success. These public programs have also been able to create more seamless transitions for students into kindergarten. We suggest that the state institute a pre-school accrediting process that leads to program licensure. Improving the quality of Oregon's pre-school programs also requires the creation of an accountability system, similar to the one in use by Head Start. This accountability system might include a standard "program report card" that enables parents to assess the quality of the programs and that motivates school districts to meet high standards.

As the state explores allocation of resources for early childhood education, we understand that it will be important to affirm strong programs. We recommend that the programs receive the funding necessary to make a difference in enabling students to have a jump start on their education. We also recommend that the state develop policy standards and guidelines to make it easier for schools to

use available public resources to serve pre-school-aged children. This would help to support equitable, high-quality programming and help to break down socio-economic barriers.

- **Recommendation: Institute the use of a reliable kindergarten readiness instrument**

Also essential is the identification of a reliable kindergarten readiness instrument that will provide on-going assessment and feedback to our early childhood efforts. This assessment instrument should not only provide a sound vehicle for early childhood program evaluation and accountability, but also serve as a diagnostic instrument that enables schools to plan instruction and intervention as children enter kindergarten. We believe the same instrument should be used statewide, and school districts should have regulatory authority to administer it to children attending private as well as public pre-schools. We stand ready to work with the Early Learning Council and the Kindergarten Readiness Team on development and implementation of Oregon's Kindergarten Readiness Assessment.

Key Investment Area II:

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS—A CONTINUUM OF TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT FOR HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

- **Recommendation: Remove barriers and provide support for a seamless transition from high school to post-secondary education**

As with the move from pre-school into kindergarten, the shift from high school to post-secondary education constitutes a critical juncture in a student's life. As educational leaders, we must create a seamless transition from high school to career and technical education programs, associate degree programs, and four-year university programs. This objective can best be accomplished initially by providing the supports necessary—including mentoring programs, summer instructional support, early starts for ninth graders—for eighth graders to make a successful transition to high school. Later, we must intentionally begin the transition to college in grade 11. Providing state support that enables students to enroll in technical courses, internships, and community college and university courses—either on the high school campus or at a community college or university campus for dual credit—would significantly enhance the likelihood that students complete high school and are successful in their post-secondary program. The last two years of high school could become a period of blended high school and post-secondary experiences.

In practice, this outcome necessitates removing institutional barriers to seamless transition. It would require certification of high school teachers to teach community and four-year college courses; additional funding to subsidize tuition in apprentice, community college, and university programs; and support for bus transportation to post-secondary programs. It means that Oregon's community and four-year colleges would need to accept these credits toward meeting the requirements of the Oregon Transfer Module, AAOT, and two-year certification programs, or as applicable to a four-year degree. It would also necessitate integrating secondary and post-secondary guidance and academic support systems to ensure students' successful progression from high school to post-secondary education. Systems of incentives for students, districts, and colleges should be explored and developed so that the silos that exist between K-12 and higher education can be eliminated and promising students from traditionally underserved backgrounds have a realistic opportunity of achieving a college degree without incurring huge debt loads.

- **Recommendation: Launch a statewide college and career readiness initiative**

Critical to this professional development effort is a deeper understanding of and commitment to the target of college and career readiness. College and career readiness doesn't occur just during the high school years. Expectations need to be set well in advance, especially in grades 4 through 10, so that all students can achieve this goal. Our current educational systems are guided by standards. However, these standards do not encompass all the experiences and preparation a student requires for success in post-secondary education. College and career readiness involves much more than meeting reading and math benchmarks. There is a well-delineated array of cognitive strategies, content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual skill and awareness that we need to help students develop so they will be successful in college and the workplace. In order to build foundational understanding across the state of what it means to be college and career ready, elementary, middle and high schools must begin to implement age-appropriate strategies to ensure that all students are prepared.

Over the past decade breakthrough work has been done in this area of preparing students to be college and career ready. Systemic approaches, diagnostic tools, and college readiness assessments are available to schools and districts. We now have the capacity to help educators at the elementary, middle, and high school levels re-focus their attention on the target of college and career readiness. Teachers need to learn to raise their expectations of themselves and of their students, from engaging students in real research projects to having them write and deliver analytical arguments to developing skills in critical thinking, problem solving, and persistence. We recommend that the state launch a statewide initiative to structure Oregon's instruction, program development, and teacher education systems to enable students to be well prepared for post-secondary education.

- **Recommendation: Provide support for college-ready and college-placement assessments**

College and career readiness entails ensuring that students are sufficiently prepared for post-secondary education that they are not assigned to "developmental" or "remedial" courses upon admission. This preparation would depend upon the state's underwriting the costs of college readiness assessments for all students. It would also be beneficial to enable schools to administer such college placement instruments as COMPASS or ACUPLACER during a student's junior and senior years so that any needed remediation could be offered during high school. Having the tests that are administered in high school be determinative of a student's placement in college would serve as an incentive for students and schools to focus on those identified skills and knowledge that require strengthening prior to college entrance. Given that few students who require remedial coursework in college ever complete their program, this investment would be advantageous for both the student and the post-secondary institution.

Key Investment Area III:

EDUCATOR EFFECTIVENESS—PREPARING TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS TO MEET THE COLLEGE AND CAREER TARGETS

- **Recommendation: Invest in educator effectiveness, including additional funding for professional development needed to achieve 40-40-20**

Making inroads into the P–20 landscape and expanding options and opportunities for all students beyond grade 12 are essential ingredients to achieve the goals of 40-40-20. However, to ensure success, we believe that Oregon will need to commit to a robust, strategic, and sustained investment in educator effectiveness. Districts require additional resources to support locally-directed investment in effective, high-quality professional development. Districts could choose from among local, regional and/or statewide professional development approaches. This investment would provide broad access and strong opportunities for all teachers and leaders, regardless of geography, school or district size, or priorities determined through local control.

The state has set the course toward college and career readiness through the adoption of the Common Core State Standards and initiatives to promote college readiness standards. Just as ensuring that every student demonstrates mastery of the CCSS will require additional instructional time for many of our students (through the extended-day and extended-year programs mentioned previously), so will attainment of these standards necessitate additional professional development for all instructional staff. Professional development for teachers and administrators should include development of new curriculum, implementation of new rigorous teaching and learning standards and strategies, and development of knowledge and skills for assessment literacy.

The passage of Senate Bill 290, the approval of the ESEA flexibility waiver, and the subsequent development and approval by the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) of the *Oregon Framework for Teacher & Administrator Evaluation and Support Systems* (http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=3637) have collectively established a series of "must-do" activities for every school district in the state with regard to educator effectiveness. Implementing SB 290 with fidelity will require additional resources and support—but the provision of these resources and support will also ensure that there is a quality teacher in every Oregon classroom and an effective leader in every Oregon school.

The modest progress achieved in the last few years deserves to be protected, expanded, and ultimately strengthened through a combination of strategies, including the restructuring of teacher and administrator preparation, high quality induction and mentoring programs for all new teachers and leaders, teacher-led career enhancement through such initiatives as the CLASS Project and SB 252, and support and resources provided to effectively implement the rigorous performance evaluation systems delineated in SB 290. We believe Oregon's success in achieving 40-40-20 will be directly proportional to sustained, statewide investment in these fundamental systems to enhance the core effectiveness of educators.

Key Investment Area IV:

SUPPORT FOR CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

- **Recommendation: Support family resource centers and other programs that help parents support their children's success in school, or address childhood hunger and health**

The work outlined thus far can be highly effective in helping to close the achievement gap between students of varying backgrounds and ability levels. However, unless we work closely with families, we risk our most vulnerable students' not meeting their performance targets. While teachers and administrators strive diligently to reach out to families, minority or economically disadvantaged families often need additional support to obtain critical services, communicate with school personnel, and feel welcome in the school house. Family resource centers, or family resource liaisons within the schools, can bridge the distance between the school and the family. As repositories of community resources that families can access, and as a single point of contact and outreach for communication, family resource centers and liaisons can make the school feel inviting to these families and can empower them to empower their children to succeed. Also needed is a structured program of parent education that builds a lasting partnership between parents and educators with regard to the ongoing education of children, that helps parents prepare their toddlers for pre-school and kindergarten, and that encourages parents to develop a college-going mindset in the home. Funding these centers/staff and integrating wraparound services into the schools could provide that vital bridge and break down cultural and economic barriers to success.

- **Recommendation: Provide state-level leadership to make the changes necessary to significantly improve outcomes for Oregon's ELL students.**

The ELL Collaborative is a group of Oregon school districts who have shown initiative by developing a set of recommendations for improving outcomes for ELL students. Recommendations include: 1) improving teacher preparation for serving English Language Learners, 2) aligning curriculum, instruction and assessments with best practices from research specific to needs of ELL students, 3) improving assessments (e.g., ELPA and OAKS) to provide more accurate measurements of a student's knowledge of content and English language acquisition, and 4) expanding the network of districts across the state that are working together in a collaborative fashion regarding the needs of ELL learners. State level leadership is urgently needed to bring districts and other partners together, and to move these recommendations forward.

Key Investment Area V.

SYSTEMIC SUPPORT FOR IMPROVEMENT—RETHINKING THE STATE-LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE

- **Recommendation: Develop a state and regional system that provides needed support for school districts**

Currently, neither ODE nor the existing Education Service District (ESD) structure has enough capacity to fully support individual school districts in their efforts to reach the 40/40/20 target. Both entities were developed for a different era of education. The 40/40/20 goal provides the impetus to revitalize the existing ODE/ESD structures with a new statewide and regional support system that provides key services and supports. This approach would extend and enhance state and regional capacity and be more responsive to the specific needs of students and districts. For example, there are immediate pressing needs in the areas of educator quality (SB 290) and implementation of Common Core State Standards and professional development. COSA and its partners regionally trained more than 2,500 administrators and teachers on CCSS math and reading standards last year, and will provide cost-effective regional CCSS training again in 2012-13. By utilizing partnerships and a dynamic regional approach, ODE can better support innovation, program improvement and program implementation.

To complement this approach, we believe ODE's effectiveness would be increased by a shift from its current emphasis on compliance to a role of leadership for change. Further, we suggest revisiting the concept of changing the governance structure of the ESDs from elected boards to representative superintendent boards. This will help to support the goal of making sure that regional services meet district needs.

- **Recommendation: Support collaboration and innovation at the district level**

Many districts are willing and eager to undertake bold initiatives that will increase the efficiency of their operations, support student achievement through educational reforms, and develop additional social and community capital to serve students and families. However, repeated reductions in state funding preclude their investing in the steps needed to get such initiatives underway. State funding is needed to underwrite proposals for innovations to pursue restructuring and new collaborations, some of which would pay for themselves within a few years through increased efficiencies. We recommend that the state consider incentives for districts and ESDs that choose to innovate – such as improving efficiencies and effectiveness in business practices by combining services across district lines, or developing relationships with human services and nonprofit agencies to support students and families – through regional services or through separate partnerships. We further recommend that the state offer financial support to districts choosing to participate in an annual organizational assessment that both focuses on continuous improvement and aligns with high-quality student achievement and district reform.

CONCLUSION

By investing in these five priority areas, Oregon has the greatest potential to achieve its goals of 40/40/20, equity, and a seamless P–20 system – and the greatest opportunity for reaching our seemingly unreachable star.

We realize that some people may perceive an underlying tension between investing additional state resources in these areas versus restoring former funding to districts so that they can once again provide a full-year schedule and reasonable staffing for all students. Both goals are vitally necessary. School districts have made painful compromises over the past years that need to be remembered and remediated, and we are supportive of the state's efforts to contain costs in order to appropriate any saved funds to restore those educational programs. We offer these proposals for investment, assuming a prior or concomitant restoration of our basic systems—the number of school days, length of the school day, a broad curriculum inclusive of the arts, and reasonable class size.

It is imperative that we, as school executives, champion the 40/40/20 vision by making a leadership commitment to creating the best possible conditions for improving teaching and learning throughout the state. Accordingly, our Vision and Policy Coalition proposes an unprecedented effort by every school district to the development of a clear, coherent, comprehensive, well-articulated vision of teaching and learning. This commitment will include defining and supporting a variety of instructional approaches directly related to specific learning outcomes, as well as providing high-quality professional development, effective teacher mentoring, professional learning communities, and a systemic approach to the evaluation of teachers and principals. These concentrated efforts will provide both a foundation and a backdrop for the ongoing work to achieve the 40/40/20 vision.

Together with Oregon's leaders, educators, parents, students and citizens, we can create and sustain an education system that drives innovation, secures Oregon's global competitiveness and fuels our economy for decades to come. We strongly support the direction the state is taking in education and hope these recommendations are helpful in OEIB's strategic planning. We stand ready to provide additional information or input upon request.

KEY INVESTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

Prerequisite Recommendation

- **Increase baseline funding to make possible our essential, basic systems—the number of school days, staffing, length of the school day, a broad curriculum inclusive of the arts, and reasonable class size.**

I. Early Childhood Education Recommendations

- **Provide and require full-day kindergarten for all children**
- **Provide resources for extended-day and extended-year programs**
- **Assure pre-school quality, promote collaboration with public schools**
- **Institute the use of a reliable kindergarten readiness instrument**

II. College and Career Readiness Recommendations

- **Remove barriers and provide support for a seamless transition from high school to post-secondary education**
- **Launch a statewide college and career readiness initiative**
- **Provide support for college-ready and college-placement assessments**

III. Educator Effectiveness Recommendations

- **Invest in educator effectiveness, including additional funding for professional development needed to achieve 40-40-20**

IV. Family Engagement Recommendations

- **Support family resource centers and other programs that help parents support their children success in school, or address childhood hunger and health**
- **Provide state-level leadership to make the changes necessary to significantly improve outcomes for Oregon's ELL students.**

V. Systemic Support for Improvement Recommendations

- **Develop a state and regional system that provides needed support for school districts**
- **Support collaboration and innovation at the district level**

Oregon Association of School Executives
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